

# Communication patterns in classroom discourse: contextualization cues in a secondary school EFL classroom

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UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB  
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TEFL SECTION

**COMMUNICATION PATTERNS IN CLASSROOM DISCOURSE:  
'CONTEXTUALIZATION CUES' IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL CLASSROOM**

Master thesis

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SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU

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**KOMUNIKACIJSKI UZORCI U DISKURSU UNUTAR UČIONICE:  
‘KONTEKSTUALNI ZNAKOVI’ U NASTAVI ENGLESKOG KAO STRANOG  
JEZIKA U SREDNJOJ ŠKOLI**

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## **Abstract**

This master thesis discusses the importance of noticing and understanding contextualization cues in a foreign language classroom, more specifically the use and understanding of contextualization cues in a secondary school EFL classroom and their importance in inferring the meaning of the context in classroom discourse, as well as the effects that certain contextualization cues can have on the classroom discourse and its participants.

The paper first explains the importance of studying contextualization cues. This is followed by the explanation of the study that deals with how language in use is affected and shaped by the context in which it is used, namely the study of classroom discourse analysis. The following parts of the paper deal with the notion of context and the notion of conversational inference respectively, both of which are crucial for understanding the importance of contextualization cues since they are dependent on each other.

The theoretical part of the paper is followed by the author's research on contextualization cues in a secondary school EFL classroom which was done by observing classroom discourse in a classroom in a high school in Zagreb. The data for the research was collected by means of written notes from the observed classes, was analyzed and elaborated on with regard to the theory on the selected topic of the paper.

In the end, the author's interpretation of the importance of contextualization cues and their function in classroom discourse were given based on the examples from the observed classes.

**Keywords:** context, contextualization cues, English as a foreign language, classroom discourse

## **1 Introduction**

According to Gumperz (1982) and other authors who dealt with the topic of contextualization cues such as Tannen (1984), Wierzbicka (1991), Addendorf (1996) and Rymes (2008), it can be argued that contextualization cues play a critical role in language use and communication. They help to establish the context of an utterance, signal shifts in meaning, and provide additional information about the speaker's intentions and the meaning of an utterance. In an EFL classroom, contextualization cues play an important role in second language learning, as they can help students to better understand and use the target language, as well as the teachers to understand their students and their needs and to adapt their lessons accordingly. The use and understanding of contextualization cues can vary greatly among language learners, as they are influenced by factors such as their first language, culture, and level of language proficiency. Therefore, it is crucial for both the teachers and the students in EFL classrooms to be aware of various contextualization cues that shape classroom discourse and give it additional meaning.

In this paper, the author will examine the role of contextualization cues in an EFL classroom. Since there is a large number of contextualization cues that emerge in the classroom discourse and it would be impossible to note and analyze all of them, in this paper the focus will be put on analyzing three types of contextualization cues that emerged most frequently in the EFL classroom discourse observed for the purpose of this paper.

Through a review of the existing research on the topic of contextualization cues, I will explore the ways in which contextualization cues can be used to enhance communication and support second language learning. I will then report on my study of the use of contextualization cues by the teacher and the students in a secondary school EFL classroom.

Upon collecting the literature connected to the subject of my thesis, I have come to the realization that there are not many research based sources or works that deal specifically with the topic of contextualization cues in a secondary school EFL classroom, especially among Croatian EFL learners. For this reason, I decided to study the use and understanding of contextualization cues in a Croatian EFL classroom. This paper gives insight into how non-native speakers of English as a second language infer meaning from different contextualization cues used in the classroom as well as into their competence of using contextualization cues in order to communicate in the classroom. The paper also gives insight into how teachers can use different contextualization cues for different purposes – for example to interest and engage students or to maintain discipline in the classroom. Therefore, I think that this paper could serve

as a valuable source of information on how to recognize and interpret different contextualization cues within classroom discourse and how to use them for different purposes in teaching or to give additional meaning to classroom communication.

## **2 Why study contextualization cues?**

How could a study of contextualization cues in an EFL classroom be beneficial for both teachers and learners and why should one take the time to study classroom discourse in general? According to Rymes (2008), there are at least four reasons why studying their own talk in classroom discourse could be beneficial for teachers and students respectively:

- “1. Insights gained from classroom discourse analysis have enhanced mutual understanding between teachers and students;
2. By analyzing classroom discourse themselves, teachers have been able to understand local differences in classroom talk – going beyond stereotypes or other cultural generalizations;
3. When teachers analyze discourse in their own classrooms, academic achievement improves; and
4. The process of doing classroom discourse analysis can itself foster an intrinsic and lifelong love for the practice of teaching and its general life-affirming potential”

(Rymes 2008: 5)

By being aware of the types of contextualization cues and the context in which the students use certain cues, teachers are learning invaluable information about their students and the way in which they communicate. In accordance with this, it can be concluded that the teacher’s awareness of contextualization cues and the information gathered on students when taking into consideration the use of contextualization cues among the students can be beneficial for the students in terms of facilitating classroom talk and learning (Rymes 2008: 8).

## **3 Classroom discourse analysis, context and conversational inference**

The following chapter deals with three aspects of linguistics that play a significant role in understanding the concept and the importance of contextualization cues. Firstly, the concept of classroom discourse analysis will be briefly defined and explained in terms of its significance for teaching English as a foreign language. This is followed by a brief explanation



of the concept of context and its significance in shaping communication occurring in the classroom. Lastly, this chapter deals with the concept of conversational inference and its importance for understanding the context of a discourse.

### 3.1 Classroom discourse analysis

As it is known, the term *discourse* refers to language in use. Discourse analysis is “the study of how language-in-use is affected by the *context* of its use” (Rymes 2008: 12). Classroom discourse analysis plays an important role in teaching English as a foreign language (any foreign language for that matter) since it provides insight into the dynamics of communication that occurs within the classroom setting. By analyzing the language, interaction patterns and other aspects of language use that take place in the classroom, researchers and educators can gain a better understanding of how students learn, and teachers can thus use this insight to support communication in the classroom as well as the learning process among students.

### 3.2 Context

The term ‘contextualization cues’ was coined by John J. Gumperz (1982, 1992, 1996) and has since been extensively used by other scholars in their research, some of which will also be presented throughout this thesis. In order to understand the notion of contextualization cues, first we need to make ourselves familiar with the notion of context and how context influences communication in the classroom. The idea of context will be briefly explained in the following part of this paper.

According to Schegloff (1992), there are two types of contexts. Context can be “intra-interactional” – referring to the conversation itself, or it can be external to the interaction, such as the discussion's physical location and the social characteristics attributed to the speakers (for example age, socioeconomic status, gender, and others). If context is intra-interactional, it means that the context is being updated in flow of the communication and is thus flexible since the interlocutors need to work together to make the context understandable and relevant. (Schegloff 1992: 195-197). Context is critical in terms of contextualization cues since these cues are used to help establish and make sense of the context in which communication is taking place. Context refers to the social, cultural, and situational factors that influence how

communication is led and understood. It can thus be concluded that the absence of clear contextualization cues could lead to misunderstandings as the communication could become ambiguous or difficult to understand.

According to Rymes (2008: 14) “context can be bounded by physical borders” – for example, discourse in a classroom could vary in terms of appropriate language used. Language that is appropriate in a classroom may differ from language used outside of the classroom. On the other hand, context could also “be bounded by discourse borders” – language within a lesson may differ from the language used after the lesson ends. For example, “[c]uriosity and creativity welcomed and encouraged in other contexts, when brought into the classroom context, may count as disruptive” (15). All these external factors that influence communication in the classroom help teachers to better understand their students and learn about their individual possibilities in terms of language use. This is crucial for facilitating communication in the classroom as well as for facilitating learning among the students and making the students aware of the ways in which they can use the English language to communicate in the classroom as well as in different contexts outside of the classroom.

Furthermore, Rymes also mentions the possibility of students bringing new forms of speaking into the classroom and thus changing the way classroom discourse occurs. She mentions an example of teachers incorporating the student’s ways of using language into their classroom lessons and this leading to the change of student’s experience of school and an increase in class participation as well as the student’s development in terms of classroom success (Rymes: 2008: 17). The legitimacy of this assumption can also be seen on various examples from the study that I have conducted with the purpose of writing this thesis, which will be mentioned later in this paper.

Moreover, being able to communicate properly in a foreign language also implies the ability to act and communicate according to the context of the communication. Dorr-Bremme argues, with reference to Goodenough 1964; Gumperz 1982 and Hymes 1974, that

“Communicative competence involves more than Chomsky's (1965) linguistic competence, that is, the capacity to employ surface structural rules of phonology and syntax and deep structural interpretive procedures. It also entails the ability to interpret and enact social behaviors in ways deemed appropriate in context by members of the culture or speech community at hand” (1990: 380).

In an EFL classroom, the notion of context plays a significant role. Sometimes the students may not be familiar with the cultural and linguistic norms of the foreign language that they are learning. Contextualization cues can help bridge this gap and make communication

more effective and efficient. By using clear and appropriate contextualization cues, teachers can help students to understand the meaning of new words and concepts, identify shifts in meaning, and engage in meaningful conversations. When it comes to student's use of contextualization cues, the knowledge and correct recognition of contextualization cues among the students also play an important role in making the classroom discourse understandable for students themselves as well as for facilitating the appropriate use of the foreign language in the real life in general.

### 3.3 Conversational inference

Another important aspect of communication is the notion of *conversational inference*, which is the name for the way in which discourse participants understand the conversation and make sense of what is being said. Gumperz defines conversational inference as “situated and presupposition-bound interpretive process, by which interlocutors assess what they perceive at any one point in a verbal encounter and on which they base their responses.” (Gumperz 1996: 375). Gumperz noted that conversational inference does not only involve one's grammatical and lexical knowledge, but also one's personal and cultural background knowledge. This can include the interlocutor's personal attitudes and beliefs, their attitudes towards other interlocutors as well as their socio-cultural background knowledge (Gumperz 1996, referred to in Ishida 2003: 10). In other words, conversational inference is the process of understanding what is being said based on the context of a conversation or discourse. It is one's ability to make sense of what is being said by taking into account not just the words themselves, but also the speaker's intentions, the context, and the background knowledge of the listener.

In my opinion and according to my experience from school practice, as well as from the experience gathered through my research for the purpose of this paper, conversational inference can be challenging for students who are learning a foreign language and may not have a strong understanding of the cultural and linguistic norms of the language they are learning. Teachers can help students to develop their conversational inference skills by providing explicit instruction on how to make inferences based on context, modelling effective inferencing strategies, and providing opportunities for students to practice making inferences in real-life communication situations. By developing their conversational inference skills, students can become more effective communicators and can learn to navigate complex communication situations in a more efficient way. In the process of communicating, the

participants use various verbal and nonverbal signals to carry the message and to make sense of the message. These signals are called contextualization cues.

#### **4 Definition of contextualization cues**

As it was previously stated, the term *contextualization cues* was coined in the 1980s by John J. Gumperz. The term *contextualization cues* was first used by Gumperz in his 1982 book ‘Discourse Strategies’, in which he made the case that the participants in a communication utilize a range of linguistic and non-linguistic clues to communicate their intentions and convey meaning.

According to Adendorff (1996),

“contextualization cues help to delineate the context (i.e., as it unfolds, as it changes, both in broad outline and in fine shading), thereby channeling or guiding interpretation and so giving additional meaning to what is said and done in a conversation. Contextualization cues enable those who are interacting to signal information such as:

1. The kind of activity they are engaged in (e.g., a chat or something requiring a greater personal commitment).
2. The real meaning of what is being said.
3. How what is being said relates to what was said earlier or to what is still to come.
4. The role relationships and other social relationships implicated between those conversing”

(Adendorff 1996: 390).

Moreover, Auer (1992) also argues that contextualization cues are dependent on the context in which they occur, i.e. that they carry no semantic value when considered on their own, but that it is the context in which they occur that gives them meaning and helps the listener discern the meaning of an utterance.

Upon the analysis of the literature on the topic of contextualization and contextualization cues, I have singled out the cues that appear most frequently in an EFL classroom and it is these contextualization cues that I focused on in my research on the use of contextualization cues in an EFL classroom. According to various sources consulted for the purpose of this paper (Gumperz 1982; Rymes 2008; Tannen 1984; Wierzbicka 1991 and others), there are many types of contextualization cues that must be taken into account when interpreting communication and construing the meaning of an utterance – for example prosody, deictic expressions, discourse markers, nonverbal cues such as gesture, posture, gesticulation

etc., social and cultural knowledge and register, and others. In the following chapter, I will name some examples and characteristics of each of these mentioned cues.

#### 4.1 Types of contextualization cues and their characteristics

According to Gumperz (1992: 231) *prosodic contextualization cues* include cues such as intonation, pitch, and rhythm of speech. As I have witnessed in the observed classroom, all of these cues can be used to signal different contexts of the discourse, for instance emphasis, emotion, sarcasm or personal preferences, to name a few. For example, the rising or falling pitch of the teacher's voice can indicate whether the utterance is a question or a statement. A sudden change in pitch or stress can indicate emphasis, while a change in rhythm or intonation can indicate annoyance, humour, or other emotional states. Paying attention to these cues and their proper understanding help the listeners to understand the context of communication beyond what is being said through words themselves and the proper use of these contextualization cues helps the speakers of a foreign language to use them properly in their communication.

According to the Glossary of Linguistic Terms, *deictic expressions* are expressions “whose interpretation is relative to the (usually) extralinguistic context of the utterance, such as:

- who is speaking
- the time or place of speaking
- the gestures of the speaker
- the current location in the discourse”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, deictic expressions are words or phrases that the speaker uses to specify, for example a time or place, words such as *now*, *here* or *tomorrow*. These contextualization cues are easy to discern, and they help the listener establish the temporal and spatial context of the message.

*Discourse markers* can also be considered a type of contextualization cues. They are defined as

“words or phrases, such as *well*, *but*, and *frankly*, which usually occur at the beginning of an utterance and serve as conceptual glue which binds together the material from the preceding utterance to that of the following sentence. Though they are homophonous with lexical items, they are separate linguistic entities, with distinct meanings, and are essential for making a

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<sup>1</sup> Glossary of Linguistic Terms: Deixis <https://glossary.sil.org/term/deixis>

conversation sound natural and unstilted” (Fraser, in *New Directions in second Language Pragmatics* 2021: 314).

These contextualization cues help the listeners to understand the speaker’s intentions and attitudes, as well as to understand the structure and organization of the conversation.

In her book Rymes lists, adapted from Bloome et al. 2005, the following examples of *nonverbal contextualization cues*: “gesture, facial expression, eye movement, eye gaze, eye contact (and lack of eye contact, or shifts in eye contact), posture, body movement, facial direction, style of body movement, body position (and how close you get to someone)” (Rymes 2008: 202). According to my experience, the meanings behind these contextualization cues are the most complicated to discern in a classroom, especially since there may be several persons engaged in discourse at one point. Certain gestures and facial expressions, i.e. body language in general also give context to the conversation and carry the meaning of what is being said beyond the words themselves. For example, if someone says “I’m fine” with a smile and a relaxed posture, the nonverbal cues that the speaker used show us that the person is actually feeling good. On the other hand, if someone says “I’m fine” with a frown on their face, their nonverbal cues can suggest that they are actually feeling upset or angry.

Rymes (2008: 201), with reference to Honig (1991), gives another example of how nonverbal contextualization cues can impact discourse. In this example, she shows how a downward glance can have a different meaning based on the context, in this case on the teacher’s perception of the student. She argues that a downward glance can be considered as a sign of respect and formality in many Native American or Latino communities, whereas in the American classroom this form of contextualization cue can be considered as a lack of attention by the student. In conclusion, paying attention to and understanding the nonverbal contextualization cues in the classroom can help the teachers understand their students better and to adapt the communication according to the context of the classroom.

*Register* is defined as “specific lexical and grammatical choices as made by speakers depending on the situational context, the participants of a conversation and the function of the language in the discourse” (Halliday 1989: 44). In other words, the term can be interpreted as a level of formality of an utterance, which can be indicated by the choice of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. Register can be considered a contextualization cue in communication since it refers to the variety of language that is used in a particular situation or context, and it can provide important information about the relationship between the speakers, the purpose of the communication, and the level of formality or informality that is appropriate in a conversation. For example, a speaker may use a more formal register when speaking to a

teacher, and a more informal register when speaking to friends or family members. The use of different registers can signal important information about the social relationships between the speakers. To conclude, the use of register can provide important contextualization cues that help listeners to better understand the meaning and intent behind the words used in communication.

The knowledge of how speakers use context to effectively communicate in a range of circumstances has been aided by Gumperz's work on contextualization cues. Since Gumperz coined the term in the 1980s, it has been widely used by other linguists in their research. Deborah Tannen, for instance, was another linguist that engaged in the study of contextualization cues in her book 'Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk Among Friends'. She used the term *contextualization cues* to refer to the various linguistic and non-linguistic cues that speakers use to establish and maintain the context of a conversation (Tannen 1984). Tannen argues that contextualization cues can take various forms, including not only observable cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language, but also more subtle linguistic cues such as pronoun use, sentence structure, and word choice (Tannen 1984: 4). According to Tannen, these cues are critical for successful communication, as they allow speakers to indicate their intentions and to help their listeners understand the meaning behind their words. She argues that different cultural and social groups use different types of contextualization cues, and that failure to understand these cues can lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. (Tannen 1984: 34-35)

Another linguist, Anna Wierzbicka, has argued that contextualization cues play a crucial role in language comprehension and that the role of cultural factors in interpreting these cues should not be underestimated. She has focused on the concept of *cultural scripts*, which she defined as "tacit norms, values and practices widely shared, and widely known (on an intuitive level) in a given society" (Wierzbicka, in Trosborg 2010: 43). According to Wierzbicka (1994), cultural scripts and the contextualization cues connected to them provide a framework for interpreting language and communication, and failure to recognize or understand these cues can lead to miscommunication or even conflict. She has emphasized the importance of studying contextualization cues to gain a deeper understanding of how language and culture are intertwined.

## **5 Contextualization cues in a secondary school EFL classroom**

In order to conduct a study of the use of different contextualization cues in a secondary school EFL classroom, I have decided to analyse classroom discourse in a selected class in a high school in Zagreb. I spent a week and a half observing the class and the interactions occurring within the lessons. The lessons that I observed were all EFL classes. The class was comprised of 24 second-year EFL students who had been learning English as a first foreign language for more than ten years. In total I observed 9 lessons.

I spent the first three lessons observing the overall situation in the class and deciding which contextualization cues to focus on and to code in my notes for the purpose of this research. Since it would be almost impossible to focus on every single contextualization cue that emerges in discourse, I decided to focus on those that emerged most frequently in the lessons that I had observed: prosodic contextualization cues, nonverbal contextualization cues and the use of different registers as contextualization cues. I decided to discard my original idea of recording the classroom interaction as this would be too complicated to code for my level of expertise in data collection. Instead, extensive written notes were made in the observed lessons that would yield enough examples for the purpose and scope of this paper.

After making the decision of which contextualization cues to focus on, I started making notes on the appearance of certain contextualization cues by writing down the examples of contextualization cues and the utterances in which they occurred, as well as writing down under which circumstances certain contextualization cues occurred. After each observed lesson, I read my notes and noted my opinions on why certain cues appeared in certain utterances, made notes about their meaning in the given context, as well as notes on how I think these cues affected the classroom discourse. The following chapters of this paper show the examples of contextualization cues in the lessons that I observed and my understanding of their meaning, their effect on the classroom discourse and some general opinions of the importance of understanding these contextualization cues by relying onto the theory discussed in this paper.

### **5.1 Examples of different contextualization cues used by the teacher and the students in the observed class**

Since mentioning and analysing all of the examples noted when observing these classes would take up too much space and time, I will only list a few examples for each category of



contextualization cues that I decided to focus on as they were used by the teacher as well as by the students.

### 5.1.1 Examples of prosodic contextualization cues in teacher's communication

Each lesson that I observed included numerous examples of the teacher's use of prosodic contextualization cues for giving meaning to a certain context of the classroom discourse. Sometimes these clues carried the meaning of the teacher's annoyance with the lack of discipline within the class, at other times they indicated her appreciation of the students engaging in conversation, at still other times they indicated the teacher's intention to explain something and her desire for the students to pay attention to her words. The following examples show how differences in the prosody can serve as contextualization cues for giving meaning to an utterance by the teacher in the class.

The teacher often used high-pitched utterances in an attempt to control discipline in the class. The students would often shift their focus from the lesson and start talking to each other so the teacher would often emphasize certain parts of her speech with a high-pitched and raised voice in order to gain control of the situation by quieting the students so that she could focus the student's attention back onto the lesson. Some examples from the lessons that I have observed include the following:

#### Example 1: Use of high-pitched and raised voice to control discipline

It was the 7<sup>th</sup> period, the last period of the day for these students. Students were lacking attention and talking to each other, a lot of murmur in the class... The teacher was trying to explain the difference between British and American English: "The Americans say apartment and the **BRITISH SAY FLAT**" (high-pitched and raised voice). The murmur stopped after the teacher had raised her voice and she continued to speak in a normal, flat voice once she gained control of the discipline back. Here the use of the raised voice by the teacher indicated to the students that the teacher was annoyed by their behaviour and that they needed to shift their focus back onto the lesson and start participating in the lesson again. There were numerous other similar examples of the teacher using a high-pitched and raised voice to gain back the attention of the students and to engage them in the classroom participation.

#### Example 2: Changing the speed or the pace to explain a difficult concept

There were again numerous examples of how the teacher used slower pace to explain something that the students had difficulty understanding. In one class that was dedicated to revising for an upcoming test, the students had difficulty with shifting indirect speech into direct speech. In order to help the students understand this concept, the teacher used a slower pace than usual, presumably with the intent of giving the students enough time to process the information and to make sense of the concept. In this example, the use of the contextualization cue of slowing the pace indicated to the students that they needed to listen carefully and to think about what the teacher is explaining in order to be able to comprehend the language phenomenon in question.

### 5.1.2 Example of prosodic contextualization cues in students' communication

Among the many examples of the use of prosodic cues by the students in order to give meaning to the context of the classroom discourse, I will give one example where the teacher recognized the student's cue of using a high-pitched voice to show excitement and how that recognition led to an excellent class discussion and the engagement of the students in classroom communication.

#### Example: Use of high-pitched voice to indicate excitement

The lesson in which this contextualization cue emerged was about the money spending habits of the British youth. When the teacher started asking the students what they spent their money on, a certain student said in a high-pitched, excited voice: "I've been saving for a trip to Amsterdam with my friends!". This contextualization cue indicated to the teacher that this particular student was very excited about this trip and the teacher used this fact to engage even more students in communication by opening a discussion about traveling and the places that the students had visited or wanted to visit. All of that yielded a very relaxed class atmosphere and a lot of the students were willing to talk in English about their experiences, even though some of them had difficulty expressing themselves. Had the teacher ignored the mentioned contextualization cue and just continued with the lesson, this discussion would presumably not have developed further, and the students would not have been given the opportunity to speak and use the English language that much.

To conclude this section, I would like to argue that the importance of noticing prosodic contextualization cues and the importance of the proper understanding of these cues by both the teacher listening to their students and the students listening to their teachers plays a significant role in giving context to the classroom discourse. The proper understanding of these cues can help the teacher, e.g. to better understand their students and the student's needs in their process of learning the foreign language, and to act accordingly in order to help the students make progress in terms of their language skills. On the other hand, the student's awareness of the teacher's use of prosodic contextualization cues can help the students understand the teacher's opinions about them or the teacher's intentions concerning the structure of the lesson.

### 5.1.3 Examples of nonverbal contextualization cues in teacher's communication

As can be assumed from one's personal experience and due to the fact that people use nonverbal signals a countless number of times on a daily basis, the teacher of the class that I observed also used many nonverbal signals to convey her intentions beyond the words themselves. I will only mention a few examples that I have noted in order to make my case on the importance of noticing and understanding nonverbal contextualization cues within a classroom discourse.

#### Example 1: Use of a frown to indicate disagreement or disappointment

This teacher often used the nonverbal cue of a frown to indicate her disagreement with a student's utterance. By means of a frown on her face, she gave the students different nonverbal cues – she used it, for example, to indicate to the student that he or she should change their way of behaving or to indicate that they had to correct a certain sentence. For example, when the students pronounced something incorrectly or when they used a certain language construction incorrectly, she would often show them with a frown that they needed to think about their utterance and try to correct it themselves before she makes the correction. One example that I have noted is when a student used the word “unformal” instead of “informal”. The teacher remained silent but only made a frown on her face to show the student that something was wrong with her utterance. After a few moments, the student became aware of the mistake she had made and corrected herself without the teacher's need to interrupt the student's utterance.

### Example 2: Using posture to show authority

Another nonverbal contextualization cue that emerged frequently in this classroom was the teacher's use of posture to indicate authority. There was a number of times that this teacher used a posture of confidence and assertiveness, again, mostly to control the discipline in the classroom but also to show the students her certainty with some decisions that she had made. One example of using posture to show authority that I noted and would like to emphasize was a class in which student's essays were marked. One student was not satisfied with the mark that he had received and started complaining about it. The teacher, however, was sure of her decision and wanted to indicate to the student that she would not change her opinion so, along with explaining her decision, she also used the nonverbal contextualization cue of an assertive posture (feet firmly on the ground, head held high, crossed arms and shoulders back) to give additional meaning to what she was saying.

#### 5.1.4 Examples of nonverbal contextualization cues in students' communication

There were also numerous examples of students using nonverbal contextualization cues to give meaning to the context and here I have singled out two examples that emerged most frequently in the classes that I observed.

### Example 1: Use of posture to indicate disinterest or boredom and vice versa

This contextualization cue appeared a lot in students that did not participate much in the classroom discourse. They would often lean back or slouch on their chairs, sometimes with their feet crossed to indicate boredom or disinterest in the lesson. On the other hand, there were students who leaned forward and maintained eye contact, which indicated their interest and engagement in the discourse.

### Example 2: Use of a downward glance to indicate lack of knowledge or understanding

This contextualization cue was also one the cues that emerged most frequently when the teacher was asking questions. The students who did not know the answer to the question would often avoid eye contact and look downwards, which indicated that they were not ready to answer the question.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the importance of noticing the nonverbal contextualization cues by both the teachers and the students. The awareness and understanding

of nonverbal contextualization cues are crucial for the classroom discourse, as they can provide valuable information about the speaker's attitudes, emotions, and intentions that may not be explicitly stated in their words. Nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and posture can give additional context and meaning to an utterance, and understanding these cues can help avoid miscommunication or misunderstandings. Additionally, nonverbal cues can complement and reinforce verbal communication, making it more effective and impactful. Therefore, being able to recognize and interpret nonverbal contextualization cues is an important skill for both the teachers and the students in order to communicate effectively.

#### 5.1.5 Examples of register shift as contextualization cues in teacher's communication

Teachers use different registers when speaking in different contexts. Numerous examples of how registers can serve as contextualization cues also appeared in the observed classroom and I have selected the two most prominent ones that appeared in the classes that I observed.

##### Example 1: Using informal language and colloquial expressions in class discussions

The teacher used a notably different form of language during a class discussion in comparison to the language that she used when presenting a lesson or explaining certain language phenomena. When conducting a class discussion on various topics, the teacher shifted to a more informal type of language and used a variety of colloquial expressions and a form of language that was more approaching to the students – for example “Ok folks, let's close our books ...”; “Oh, that's so cool...”; “Did you catch the news last night?”. When using this type of language, she managed to interest the students in the conversation and entice them to engage in the classroom discourse more than usual.

##### Example 2: Using simplified language for explanations

The shift towards a more simplified language is also considered a change in the register and this is another contextualization cue that I noticed appearing in this classroom discourse very frequently. The teacher would use simplified language when talking to or explaining something to the students with limited language proficiency or when explaining a difficult concept in general. By doing so, the teacher gave these contexts the meaning of importance and sought to indicate to the students that they needed to pay close attention to her utterances

as she was explaining something important. By using simplified language with the students with limited language proficiency, the teacher showed respect of the student's differences and created an inclusive classroom environment in which every individual mattered. For example, when the teacher talked to more advanced students, she used longer sentences and a more advanced vocabulary, and while talking to the students with less language proficiency, she would break the sentences down into smaller parts and use a simpler vocabulary.

#### 5.1.6 Examples of register shift as contextualization cue in students' communication

The students of this class also used a number of register shift clues in different contexts. The following two examples that I noted while observing these classes are just a small share of numerous examples of using different registers in different contexts.

##### Example 1: Use of a different type of language for different audiences

The students from this class used different language depending on the audience they were speaking to. For example, when they were addressing their peers in group work or in dialogues, they used a different kind of language in comparison to the language that they used when addressing the teacher or giving a presentation. When speaking to their classmates, the students used a more casual and simpler language than when answering the teacher's question or addressing the teacher in general.

##### Example 2: Use of formal language vs. use of slang or informal language in different contexts

In a more formal setting, for example when giving a presentation or revising for a test, I noted that these students used a more formal language with the teacher and other students. For example, in a lesson dedicated to revising for a test, one student asked the teacher if he may ask a question instead of using the more informal way of asking – “Can I ask a question?” On the other hand, in a more informal setting, for example in class discussions or in group work, the students used more slang and colloquial language, for example phrases such as “What's up”, words such as “dude” and a lot of “like” as a buzzword – “I was...like... going to this...like... party” (an example of an utterance said by a girl from this class).

In my opinion, understanding register contextualization cues plays a significant role for teachers and students in an EFL classroom for several reasons. First, register cues can provide

the participants of the communication with important information about the social context of a communication, including the social roles and relationships of the participants, the level of formality of the interaction, and the topic being discussed. All of this can help the EFL learners to understand and interpret the meaning of the discourse and to participate in the communication more effectively. Secondly, the use of appropriate register cues is an important aspect of communicative competence in a second language. Based on my overall experience of an EFL classroom setting, as well as on my class observations for the purpose of this paper, I would like to argue that the students who are able to use register cues effectively are more likely to be perceived as competent speakers of the foreign language. Finally, understanding and knowledge of register cues can help students avoid misunderstandings in communication. As is shown in the examples above, by recognizing and using appropriate register cues, students can signal their respect for the teacher's norms and expectations, which can help to build positive relationships and enhance the effectiveness of the communication within a classroom.

Contextualization cues give additional meaning to an utterance and are crucial for understanding the context of what is being said. For example, teachers can use prosodic cues such as stress and intonation to help the students understand the meaning of a word, while the students can use nonverbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions to signal incomprehension or to indicate confusion. The change in prosody by the teacher can serve as a tool for maintaining discipline in the classroom or to show appreciation for students engaging in the communication, while the change in prosody by the student can signal excitement with a topic and their willingness to engage in the discourse. The contextual cue of register can give the teacher and students guidelines for the use of appropriate type of language in different contexts or serve as a powerful tool in building a positive relationship between the teacher and the students.

In my opinion, these cues should be observed and understood by both the teachers and the students in order to facilitate comprehension and enhance communication. It is important for the teacher to be aware of contextualization cues among their students since this can help the teacher understand their students' needs and preferences. By recognizing the contextualization cues among their students, the teacher can adapt their discourse and teaching methods to better suit the needs of their students. Additionally, being aware of contextualization cues can help the teacher identify and address any misunderstandings or miscommunications that may arise in the classroom. By recognizing and understanding different contextualization cues that emerge in their student's communication, the teacher can

help ensure that everyone in the classroom receives the help that they need and that the classroom environment is inclusive and respectful to the individual needs of the students. Furthermore, understanding contextualization cues can help the teacher to create a more engaging and interactive classroom environment. By using different contextualization cues in their teaching, the teacher can capture the attention and interest of their students, which can lead to improved learning outcomes. Overall, being aware of contextualization cues is an important aspect of effective EFL teaching and can lead to better communication, greater student engagement, and improved learning outcomes.

When it comes to the importance of the student's awareness of contextualization cues, it is crucial for students to be aware of contextualization cues used by their teacher in order to be able to understand the meaning and intent behind the teacher's messages. By recognizing and understanding the contextualization cues used by their teacher, students can improve their comprehension and interpretation of the teacher's instructions or intentions, which can lead to better learning outcomes and a more positive classroom environment.



## 6 Conclusion

The aims of this paper were to define contextualization cues and their importance for learners of English as a second language as well as for their teachers and to exemplify the use of different contextualization cues in an EFL classroom setting.

As can be concluded based on various examples given throughout this paper, it is evident that contextualization cues play a crucial role in English as a Foreign Language teaching and learning. The ability to understand and use these cues plays a significant role in terms of effective communication in a foreign language as well as successful language acquisition. The importance of contextualization cues lies in their ability to provide vital information about the context of a conversation and to add meaning to the context beyond the words spoken. Some of this information include information on the speaker's intended meaning, tone, and the relationship between the speaker and the listener.

Throughout this paper, various types of contextualization cues have been listed and defined – such as prosodic cues, nonverbal cues, register cues and others. For the purposes of the research part of the paper, different types of contextualization cues have been identified within a classroom discourse and elaborated on in terms of their meaning and importance.

This research shows only a small portion of a large amount of contextualization cues that appear in a classroom on a daily basis. Coding contextualization cues is an exhaustive task due to the large number of participants in classroom discourse and due to the dynamic nature of classroom discourse, so it is almost impossible for one person to focus on all types of contextualization cues appearing in classroom discourse. Since it would be impossible to code all contextualization cues that appear in classroom discourse, I decided to focus on the most notable and most reoccurring ones. For a more exhaustive analysis of contextualization cues in a secondary school EFL classroom, more researchers and a longer research period would be needed. It would be a good idea to video-record classes to be able to do a deeper analysis of the discourse and a much more detailed analysis and comparison of data by more researchers would be needed to yield more examples and new conclusions. However, I leave that for some future time or for future researchers who would be interested in a deeper study of this topic.

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